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Freedom Watch™

Citizens Project

Feature Article

Vouchers Are Back!

School vouchers are back! Although many thought that Colorado's 2-1 vote against vouchers in 1992 ended this issue, supporters are pushing again.

House Bill 1251, to establish a pilot voucher system in Colorado, has passed the House Education Committee and is now before the House Appropriations Committee. Sponsors of this bill include local representatives Doug Dean, Ron May and Doug Lamborn.

In addition, school voucher proponents are planning a more comprehensive voucher initiative for the November election.

School vouchers have never been popular with voters. Ballot issues failed in every state where they were brought to a vote, including the 1992 Colorado election.

However, school vouchers are a "hot button" issue in the religious right and privitization movements, whose power is increasing in Colorado.

The pending bill

House Bill 1251, if passed by the legislature, would provide the following:

- vouchers would be available to parents of children eligible for free or reduced-cost school lunches,
- vouchers could be used at any private or religious school that meets certain non-discrimination and enrollment requirements,
- school districts would pay the private or religious school tuition, or up to 80% of the per-pupil operating revenue of the district (whichever is less) for eligible students,
- no more than 5% of a district's pupil enrollment may participate in the first year; the district may add an additional 5% each year,
- eligible parents of home-schooled students may receive up to $200 per child, and
- the program will last until the year 2003 and will be evaluated then.

Many thought that Colorado's 2-1 vote against vouchers in 1992 ended this issue.

Difficult problems

School vouchers raise a number of difficult issues. These include the problem of siphoning public monies to private institutions without accountability to taxpayers, and the problem of governments regulating parochial schools to insure fair admission and treatment for all students (for example, minorities, handicapped, and children from different religions).

Other issues: the requirement that taxpayers support schools teaching particular faiths and religious doctrines, the drain on the finances of public education, the higher taxes to support this experiment (the program is estimated to cost taxpayers an additional seven million dollars), and increased balkanization as children of different races and beliefs are shuttled to separate schools.

Contrary to the claims of proponents, studies of voucher experiments in other locales have not shown improvements in student performance.

What do you want?

House Bill 1251 is now before the House Appropriations Committee. To express your opinion on this bill, please call Rep. Bill Martin, our representative on that committee, at 634-8729 or (303) 866-2965. In addition, you should call your local representative.

We'll have more on school vouchers in a future issue. If you want to help on our Task Force on school vouchers, please call Citizens Project at 520-9899. **CP**

On The Horizon

Other than school vouchers, here are four areas of upcoming interest. *Freedom Watch* will give you more details in future issues.

Religious Equality amendment

Conservative religious groups have proposed a new amendment to the U.S. Constitution to dramatically alter the traditional First Amendment approach of separation of church and state. Under this new amendment, the government could assist religions and incorporate the religious practices of particular religions into governmental affairs. Congress presently has before it two versions of this "Religious Equality" amendment and is expected to hold hearings in late March.

Parental rights

The Coalition for Parental Responsibility wants a "Parental Rights Amendment" in the Colorado Constitution. The amendment would say that parents have the right "to direct and control the upbringing, education, values and discipline of their children."

According to the Coalition, this amendment is needed to "ensure that values taught at school don't conflict with values taught at home," prevent government licensing of parents, limit psychological testing of children, and stop health clinics in schools, the children's rights movement, and federally-funded day care.

Opponents are concerned that the amendment is designed to undermine public education, and would harm children by: restricting the ability to intervene in child abuse and neglect cases, requiring parental approval for counseling or birth control information, and inviting censorship in schools.

The petition is in court in a battle over the wording, with a decision expected shortly. If the court approves the petition wording, proponents will start gathering signatures immediately to get it on the November ballot.

Taxation of non-profits

Local attorney John Patrick Michael Murphy's initiative to force churches and other non-profit groups to pay property taxes on their real estate will be on the ballot in November. With this, Colorado joins states such as Maine and New York that are considering such taxes.

When non-profits are exempt from property taxes, is that a "special right" that forces all tax paying citizens to subsidize non-profits (including churches and wealthy para-church ministries)? Or would taxing churches and ministries violate the principle of separation of church and state?

You will help decide with your vote in November!

Same-sex marriages

Prodded by the possibility that Hawaii will soon legalize same-sex marriages, the Colorado legislature is considering a bill to make same-sex marriages illegal in Colorado. Colorado Springs led the anti-gay sentiment: nine of the 14 who testified in favor of the bill came from Colorado Springs, including CFV's Will Perkins, Larry Burtoff of Focus on the Family, and Dr. Paul Cameron of the Family Research Institute.

Following testimony, the bill passed the State Affairs Committee and is going to the floor of the House. It is likely to pass the House, but prospects in the Senate are not clear. **CP**

Caucus Workshop

Make Your Vote Count!

April 2 is party caucus day. Precincts will hold caucuses to elect delegates to county assemblies. These county assemblies will decide who will run for local governmental offices.

You should be involved!

We're here to help. Citizens Project will hold a Caucus Workshop to demystify the caucus process and encourage people to take part in local politics. Representatives from the Republican and Democratic parties and the league of Women Voters will explain how you can make a difference in grassroots politics.

Come to the Caucus Workshop Thursday, March 21 6-8 p.m. at East Library. This workshop is sponsored by Citizens Project, NAACP and Ground Zero.

"The only thing required for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing." – Edmund Burke

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Schools

CFV Targets Schools!

CFV Expands Its War Against Gays and Lesbians

Will Perkins, chairman of the board of Colorado for Family Values, once said that CFV was a "one-string guitar," existing only to promote Amendment 2. Mr. Perkins' latest letter to CFV supporters puts that assertion to rest: CFV now plans to target our public schools.

The four-page CFV letter, headlined "A Message From Will Perkins," charges that schools are a "pro-homosexual propaganda session" that will stop at nothing to indoctrinate innocent children to accept homosexuality. CFV, he said, is ready for action in this "new front in our fight for family values."

According to Perkins, public schools are a "pro-homosexual propaganda session."

What's the problem?

Perkins' letter points to a number of recent "outrages" in Colorado to justify CFV's new drive on schools.

A Denver school committee suggested that high schools have posters inviting gay and lesbian youth to contact a gay youth organization. "Propaganda," said Perkins.

A Colorado Springs junior-high girl brought home from the school library a book with interpretations of history, theology and biology favorable to gays. It was, said Perkins, "a horrifying book," and it contained "no warning whatsoever about AIDS."

Perkins was dismayed when he called the school to complain about the book. The school superintendent, he said, refused to "remove this book from her young eyes."

The Colorado Parent Teacher Association last year suggested giving children information about homosexuality as part of a program that included diverse points of view. According to Perkins, this was strong evidence of pro-homosexual indoctrination in our schools. "The only information these people recognize," said Perkins, "is a full, unconditional affirmation of homosexuality."

"Join me," pleads Perkins' letter, "in standing up for 'propaganda-free' Colorado schools."

We want, said Perkins, "propaganda-free" schools.

The tenor of the times

CFV's latest initiative mirrors anti-gay efforts in other states.

A New Hampshire school board voted to ban instruction, counseling or materials "encouraging or supporting homosexuality as a positive lifestyle alternative."

The Utah legislature is considering legislation to limit or eliminate gay student clubs in public schools and allow schools to fire gay teachers if their lifestyle violates "community standards." "It promotes morality in our schools," said Utah Senator Craig Taylor.

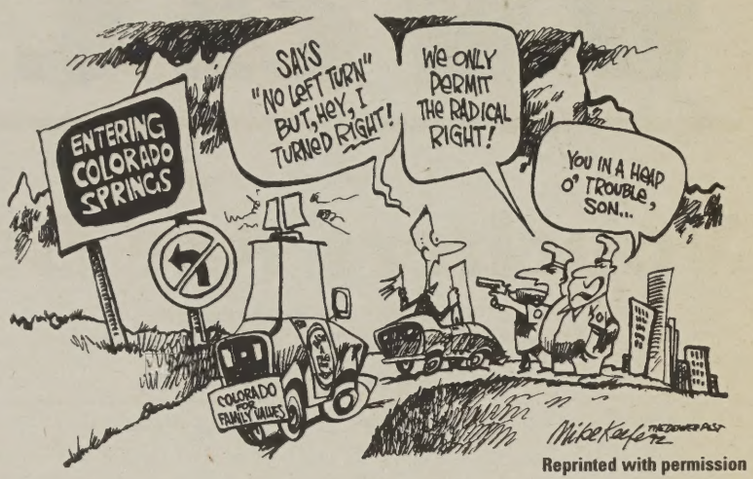
The Georgia legislature may make it a crime for gay student groups (or any gay groups) to meet in school buildings and is considering whether to prohibit books mentioning gay sex in school libraries or any state-funded libraries.

What does CFV want?

We want, said Perkins, "propaganda-free" schools. Beyond that, Perkins' letter is vague on what changes CFV will demand from school administrators and school boards.

Instead, Perkins called on CFV supporters to report "pro-homosexual indoctrination" in their schools to CFV. "Together," he said, "we can take action to stop these outrages quickly."

What directions will CFV's new school agenda take? One Denver anti-gay activist provided a good starting point: "Talking about homosexuality," he said, "promotes it."


ENTERING COLORADO SPRINGS
SAYS "NO LEFT TURN" BUT, HEY, I TURNED RIGHT!
WE ONLY PERMIT THE RADICAL RIGHT!
YOU IN A HEAP O' TROUBLE, SON...
COLORADO FOR FAMILY VALUES
Mike Keefe

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CFV's feelings are much the same.

Consequently, we can look for pressure from CFV and its followers on schools:

- to eliminate all references to gays and lesbians in any classroom discussions or in any curriculum materials, unless such references condemn gays.
- to express "outrage" at gay or lesbian student clubs or organizations in schools or which meet on school property.
- to condemn any attempts by teachers or school staff to sympathize with or assist gay or lesbian students. As Will Perkins said in his letter, "[C]ounseling means anything but therapy. Here it actually means steering children directly into the homosexual lifestyle."
- to remove books from school libraries that may discuss homosexuality or portray gays and lesbians in a sympathetic light, and to press for books teaching that homosexuality is an evil that threatens "family values."
- to condemn teachers who reveal that they are gay or lesbian or who are discovered to be gay or lesbian.
- to promote heterosexuality as the only sexual expression approved by God and appropriate for true Americans.

We can now look forward to new fights about the "immorality" of gay and lesbian students and teachers.

More controversy

CFV's new drive on public schools is certain to generate much controversy in our area. The dust not even having settled on Amendment 2, we can now look forward to new fights about the "immorality" of gay and lesbian students and teachers.

Hopefully, CFV's new anti-school campaign will soon go the way of their unsuccessful push for a restrictive Community Standards Resolution.

Our community – and the rest of Colorado – needs time to mend. CFV would do us all a favor by restraining their obsessions about gays and lesbians. **CP**

Questions & Contradictions

Will Perkins' recent letter to CFV supporters thoroughly condemns the pro-homosexual bias that he claims for our schools. However, his letter also raises three important questions that may cause difficulties for CFV's new campaign.

First, Perkins wants "propaganda-free" schools. However, he fails to show how schools can identify and avoid the hated propagandizing of values, except as he identifies "propaganda" with "homosexuality." Undoubtedly Perkins does not advocate "value-free" schools. But should schools adopt the strong anti-gay agenda that CFV and its followers are likely to advocate, they would be engaging in the very propagandizing about which Perkins so strongly objects.

Second, Perkins' letter specifically complains that the educational establishment will not allow equal time for CFV's anti-gay rhetoric. But if schools adopt Perkins' principle of "equal time" for different beliefs on sexuality, that may well open the door to equal time for affirming discussions of homosexuality.

Third, Perkins acknowledges in his letter that "Students need to be aware that all responsible people deserve respect." Few would disagree. But what type of "respect" will CFV and its followers show gay and lesbian students and teachers?

If and when CFV supporters demand that school libraries remove books with gay or lesbian themes, denigrate homosexuality, threaten gay teachers, and push to repress rights of association and free speech for homosexual students – this is respect?

At one time, CFV's campaign slogan about gays and lesbians in Colorado was "Equal Rights, Not Special Rights." CFV's new campaign against homosexuality (and homosexuals) in our schools will no longer make even a pretense of respecting equal rights for gays and lesbians. **CP**

Book Review

The Right and the Power

A review of Sara Diamond's new book **Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States.**

***Roads** to Dominion* is a straightforward chronicle of the rise of the far right in American society and politics since the end of World War II. Diamond, a professor of sociology at California universities, has long tracked conservative American politics. Her new book teases apart the myriad strands of the conservative movement before reuniting them into a coherent history.

Diamond helps readers see that the dominance of today's hard right has not been an overnight phenomenon, but rather is the result of an involved genealogy that includes anti-Communists, tax protesters, segregationists, and moral traditionalists. She divides her book into three sections: the Cold War and civil rights battles from the 1940s to the '60s, the rise of the New Right in the '60s and '70s, and finally the election of Ronald Reagan to the present.

Today's hard right includes anti-Communists, tax protesters, segregationists, and moral traditionalists.

Throughout this fifty-year journey, various groups with different concerns have rallied together, as the overriding issues facing the conservative right have shifted and changed.

Following the Second World War, preoccupation with the threat of Communism drove the movement. Diamond traces the rise of the conspiracy-minded John Birch Society and other small groups propelled by their opposition to socialism. By the '60s, segregationists gained prominence, especially in the South, as civil rights legislation threatened the racially discriminatory status quo. Diamond sees George Wallace's 1968 bid for the presidency as the last big hurrah for these segregationists.

Social issues such as opposition to abortion and gay civil rights dominate the far right's agenda.

The 1970s brought the coalition that eventually swept Ronald Reagan into office in 1980, with New Right, neoconservative, paleoconservative, and Christian Right contingents converging.

Despite internecine rifts and the election of Bill Clinton in 1992, this movement continues to grow, especially the formidably organized and resolute Christian Right. It is the Christian Right which now dominates dialogue on the right end of the political spectrum.

While the priorities of the far right have shifted through the years, there are still striking similarities between adherents fifty years ago and those of today. The John Birch Society of 1960, for example, supported states' rights and reduced spending for social programs while take out space opposing the U.N., disarmament and foreign aid. Its members tended to be young, well-educated, upper-middle-class fundamentalists, a description that fits many of today's ardent conservatives.

Diamond credits the move of right-wing activists from near obscurity to major players in the national political debate to "fusionism," the willingness of sometimes disparate groups to overlook their differences in order to work for a broader, mutually agreeable agenda.

The proliferation of conservative journals (beginning with William F. Buckley's *New Republic* in 1955) gave conservatives from many viewpoints a venue for debating their ideas. The similar banding together of conservatives twenty years later was a major factor in the elections of Reagan and, to a lesser extent, George Bush.

With the fall of Communism, traditional social issues such as opposition to abortion and gay civil rights have come to dominate the far right's agenda. Unlike the socially unacceptable notion of racial inferiority that doomed the segregationists in the '60s and '70s, Diamond sees these issues having a broad resonance with American voters beyond the right margins of the Republican Party.

Given its support from the ever-growing number of parachurches and evangelical ministries, its well-stocked campaign war chests, and its ability to reach supporters quickly through numerous media conduits, Diamond sees the right poised in 1996 to retake the White House and, with the Republican-dominated Congress, to "enforce a new era of moral righteousness and economic severity, with a vengeance."

A helpful and thorough bibliography arranged by subject, combined with abundant citations, make Diamond's chronicle a serviceable companion to those wishing to understand the far right's roots and rise to power. **CP**

Notable Quotes

"I think [parents] have a right to insist that Godless evolution not be taught to their children or their children not be indoctrinated in it."
– *Patrick Buchanan, Republican presidential candidate, reported by The New York Times, Feb. 19, 1996.*

"To read the Constitution as the charter for a secular state is to misread history. ... The Constitution was designed to perpetuate a Christian order."
– *Dr. James Dobson, Focus on the Family, quoted in Nat Hentoff's column in the Feb. 20* Gazette Telegraph. *This quote, attributed to Robert Flood, has been featured in past Focus publications.*

News Briefs

Discrimination loses in Alabama

Alabama passed a law in 1992 that gay and lesbian groups on college campuses could not receive any public money or official support, even though other student groups receive such support. That law was struck down by the U.S. District Court as discriminatory, violating rights of free speech and association. The court relied on a recent Supreme Court case, strongly supported by conservative religious organizations, which held that colleges could not discriminate against religiously-oriented student groups.

The sky is falling

Cala Mockaltis, Director of public policy information for Focus on the Family, authored a Forum article in the February 1 *Gazette Telegraph.* In that article, Mockaltis expressed concern about the court case to allow women into the all-male Virginia Military Institute. If women are allowed to participate equally with men at VMI, the article said, there will be "vast implications for this nation and its families."

According to Mockaltis, if the court requires VMI to admit women into its program "the ramifications of such a ruling would be ominous." Among those ramifications (as predicted by Mockaltis): gay marriages would be legalized, homosexuals could adopt children, women would be subject to the military draft, women could have abortions on demand, and churches might be forced to ordain women.

Such dire predictions about women's rights are a long-time staple of conservative rhetoric. An 1869 article in *Catholic World* railed against giving women the right to vote. "The conclusive objection to the political enfranchisement of women," the article thundered, "is that it would weaken and finally break up and destroy the Christian family ... and when the family goes, the nation goes too."

Tax dollars for clergy?

Working in an obscure area of church-state relations, Colorado legislators discussed the use of your tax dollars to pay for prison chaplains. The state's former program for state-funded prison chaplains ended last year, and the question was whether to appropriate $313,000 to finance nine chaplains for Colorado's 20 prisons.

Clergy testified on both sides of the issue. Some stressed the need for and benefits of spiritual guidance for inmates, while others worried about clergy being paid for and regulated by the state. The Colorado chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State argued against using tax dollars to promote religion.

The funding bill was ultimately voted down in committee, primarily due to the cost of the program. Volunteer chaplains will staff the prisons.

"Noah" environmentalists

Political conservatives often dislike environment protection laws in the belief that they stand in the way of economic progress. Religious conservatives often oppose environmental laws in the belief that environmentalists are pagans who ignore the biblical command to take dominion over the earth.

Now a group of evangelical Christians has formed to protect the environment and actively oppose efforts to weaken the Endangered Species Act. The new Evangelical Environmental Network has announced a nationwide drive to create "Noah" congregations who will support the protection of endangered species.

Moderate backlash

Responding to the political and religious threats of religious right activism, more Denver groups are forming to speak out for moderation. A Rocky Mountain chapter of the Christian evangelical movement Cry For Renewal is forming in Denver. In addition, a group of Denver educators and political leaders met to form a network to counter the right's agenda of school issues. **CP**

Inside Citizens Project

CP joins Community Shares

Citizens Project is the newest member of Community Shares Colorado, an inclusive alternative in workplace giving. **Community Shares,** which over the past 10 years has built a coalition of over 60 organizations in Denver, Boulder and on the Western Slope, has now expanded to Colorado Springs.

We look forward to reaching out to new people and collaborating with other organizations through Community Shares. If you are interested in opening your workplace to Community Shares, please call the CP office at 520-9899.

Coalition against harassment

Citizens Project is now affiliated with the **Northwest Coalition against Malicious Harassment** (NWC). The NWC works to prevent harassment, violence and bigotry based on race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin or ancestry. We will let you know about upcoming NWC events of interest.

A time to mend

Amendment 2 caused deep divisions in Colorado, particularly here in El Paso County. Now, three years after the vote, it's time to mend, says Ground Zero's Frank Whitworth. Ground Zero recently launched a **"Time to Mend"** campaign, which calls for a moratorium on all voter-based initiatives on gay and lesbian issues.

The Citizens Project Board of Directors has voted to support this campaign to help heal the divisions caused by CFV's Amendment 2. We welcome this opportunity to focus on community building and understanding.

Task Force opportunities

Itching to get more involved in the important issues of the day? How about school vouchers, the Parental Rights amendment, or the creationism/evolution public school controversy? The Citizens Project Advocacy Group is establishing a **Task Force** for each of these issues, and we invite you to join one! Task Force members will research, speak, write and/or help raise funds to counter these proposals. We need two hours a week (on average) from Task Force members to accomplish these goals. Please call if you are interested and have the time–these issues are coming up soon.

Volunteer opportunities

CP needs volunteers with strong financial skills to conduct a financial review of our organization. Such a review would help our future fundraising efforts. If you have financial skills and would like to help, please call Megan at 520-9899 for more information.

We still need a **Legislative Coordinator** to help monitor legislation at the state and federal levels. Someone with access to the Internet would be ideal.

Special thanks

Our thanks to **Rebecca Berson,** our new Research Coordinator. Rebecca has already helped tremendously by responding to numerous requests for information from the media. Thanks as well to one of our outstanding members who saw the need and purchased a new laser printer for the office. **CP**

YES, I want to do my part!

Sign me up as a member of Citizens Project.
Here is my membership contribution of:

❑ $20 (minimum annual membership dues)

❑ $35 ❑ $50 ❑ $120 ❑ more: $_____

❑ Here's my contribution, but I don't want to be a member right now.

Available for suggested donations

○ "Celebrate Diversity, Create Community" mug – *$5**
○ Citizens Project T-shirt – *$14* (specify size)*
Add $3 shipping and handling

Available for free

○ "Create Community" bumper sticker
○ "Celebrate Diversity" bumper sticker
○ February issue of *Freedom Watch*
○ Food for Thought brochure

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Thank you for your support. Please note contributions are tax deductible.

Our Mission: Citizens Project is a grassroots organization in the Pikes Peak region dedicated to upholding the traditional American values of pluralism, freedom of religion and separation of church and state.

Citizens Project

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Announcements

Caucus Workshop

April 2 is party caucus day. Citizens Project, NAACP, and Ground Zero are sponsoring a Caucus Workshop to explain the caucus process. Join us at East Library (5550 N. Union) March 21 at 6-8 p.m. For more information, call Citizens Project at 520-9899.

Human Relations Coalition

The Community Initiative, a group of community leaders committed to establishing a human relations entity in Colorado Springs, recently announced the formation of the **Pikes Peak Human Relations Coalition.** The PPHRC is a private organization dedicated to promoting positive human relations in the Pikes Peak region.

Citizens Project has been involved with the Community Initiative from the beginning, and we look forward to working closely with this group in the future. The Community Initiative is currently seeking nominations to the PPHRC Board of Directors. For more information, call 634-1525. **CP**

To Our Members

Due to a recent problem with our database, a few CP members did not receive the last issue of *Freedom Watch* in the mail. We apologize for this. Please call if you did not receive the February issue, and we will gladly send it to you.

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